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NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
2101 CONSTITUTION AVENUE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20418

January 12, 1981

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
President
Rockefeller University
1230 York Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

I write to request your service on a committee convened to address diverse aspects of the interface between scientific freedom and the requirements for national security. The committee will function under the aegis of our Committee on Science and Public Policy (COSPP) which will also provide the necessary staff and supporting services. It is premature to be highly specific with respect to the nature of the charge or the areas of concern. Rather, it is my hope that this committee will map out the general terrain and, if at all possible, develop a set of useful guidelines for the future.

A few recent episodes may suffice to illuminate the general problem. First, was a conference on bubble memory technology, concerning which officers of the Department of Commerce took exception to the participation of certain foreign nationals on the ground of potential violation of national security requirements. In a second episode, the government felt compelled to establish guidelines concerning publication of the results of certain new forms of cryptographic analysis and encoding, although the work had been conducted as unclassified studies, with federal support, by academic investigators.

As one views the future, particularly if current efforts to build useful bridges between the academic community and the industrial world prove successful while, simultaneously, international tensions heighten, and the ever more sophisticated arms build-up continues, one can anticipate similar problems arising in diverse connections. The presence of foreign nationals in American academic laboratories, for example, may increasingly come to be viewed as a sticky circumstance. Protection of proprietary interests may also raise awkward problems. You can surely imagine diverse other problems of similar kind.

I cannot predict the outcome of the proposed exercise. It may culminate in a significant public report or, alternatively, merely an internal guide for the use of those at the Academy responsible for providing advice to federal officials and agencies as problems arise. What we do seek is a thoughtful attempt to anticipate the kinds of problems that may require attention and a guiding philosophy that might serve in such instances. Details concerning the first meeting of the Committee will be provided by the COSPUP office in due course.

The Council of the Academy and Dr. Adams, Chairman of COSPUP, join me in hoping that you will find it possible to accept this invitation.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Phil", written over the word "Sincerely".

Philip Handler
President